

Information About Possible Lead In Venison

New Hampshire Fish and Game Department and
The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services

1. Why should I care about lead fragments in venison?

Recent studies in Minnesota and North Dakota confirm that lead fragments can be deposited in venison harvested with lead ammunition. The lead fragments may be too small for you to detect by sight, touch or while chewing. Since lead is a recognized human toxin, we should all be attentive to possible exposure. The amount of lead needed to cause health problems depends on a number of factors including a person's age and other lead exposures. Symptoms of lead poisoning vary and lead can have effects before noticeable signs of sickness. Pregnant woman and children less than six years old are especially sensitive to lead exposure. Children less than six years old are vulnerable to long-term health effects from lead, such as learning and behavioral problems.

2. What are the possible health risks associated with lead in venison?

The possible risks associated with exposure to lead from venison have not been determined. Lead in venison has not been linked to any documented elevated blood lead levels greater than the Federally recommended thresholds for adults or children. Although sources such as lead-based paints are more important sources of lead exposure for people, lead particles in game meat are a concern. Due to the potential health risks, people should avoid the ingestion of lead from venison by taking the following steps when hunting:

- Proper shot placement can minimize bullet fragments. Shots that impact heavy bones can enhance bullet fragmentation. Avoid venison cuts from those portions of a deer where heavy bone impacts have occurred.*
- Trim tissue liberally around venison wound channels to minimize possible lead exposure. Lead fragments were found as far as 18 inches away from the wound channel in a Minnesota study.*
- Note that due to lower velocities, shotgun slugs and muzzleloader bullets left less lead than commonly used high-powered soft-point or rapid expanding rifle bullets. Also, deer harvested with copper bullets or archery equipment are free of lead fragments.*
- If a commercial processor butchers your deer, verify that your venison will not be mixed with venison from an unknown source to ensure quality.*

3. Where do we go from here?

Hunters should relax and enjoy deer hunting. There is nothing in the studies that suggest that people shouldn't go deer hunting. Until further data are available, pregnant women and children under 6 should minimize or avoid consumption of venison harvested with lead ammunition. Everyone should exercise good judgment to minimize potential lead exposure. If you would like to read the studies about lead in venison, visit the following web site <http://www.ndhealth.gov/lead/venison/>. Information on lead prevention in New Hampshire can be found at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/DHHS/CLPPP/default.htm> or call 1-800-897-LEAD. The NH Fish and Game Department and the NH Department of Health and Human Services will post additional information on this subject on their web sites as it becomes available.